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## **A new sensibility? Photographs of violence of Wehrmacht soldiers in the Second World War**

I

PANČEVO

What could be termed a ‘semi-private’ photograph became an iconic image in the context of the so-called first Wehrmacht exhibition, “Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944” (“The war of annihilation: crimes of the Wehrmacht 1941 to 1944”), which was shown in thirty-three towns and cities in Germany and Austria between 1995 and 1999. The photograph, taken by the propaganda unit photographer Gerhard Gronefeld, shows an execution in the Serbian town of Pančevo in April 1941 [fig. 1]. Executed civilians are lying next to the cemetery wall; in front of them, an officer from the Wehrmacht’s ‘Grossdeutschland’ (Greater Germany) regiment is standing with his gun pointed at a dying victim. Next to him is an officer from the ‘Das Reich’ division of the Waffen-SS, while in the background other soldiers can be seen looking on. The photograph is from a series of fifty images of the hanging and shooting of Serbian civilians by the Wehrmacht in Pančevo. They were taken on 22 April 1941 by Gronefeld, who was a former special correspondent of the OKW<sup>1</sup> propaganda magazine “Signal”. He chose not to submit these photographs to “Signal”, instead keeping them at his home in Berlin. It was not until 1963 that he published some of them in a book about the Second World War;<sup>2</sup> but they did not elicit any particular response.

This changed, however, when the photographs were shown in the exhibition ‘The war of annihilation’. The German news magazine “Der Spiegel” used the photograph of the *coup de grâce* as the basis for a hand-drawn cover illustration to

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<sup>1</sup> *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (Wehrmacht High Command).

<sup>2</sup> H.A. Jacobsen, H. Dollinger, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg in Bildern und Dokumenten*, Munich 1963.



1. Gerhard Gronefeld, Pančevo (Serbia), 22 April 1941.  
© Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin

accompany its lead article about the crimes of the Wehrmacht,<sup>3</sup> and this prompted a number of people to come forward as eyewitnesses to the events. More and more private photographs of the executions in the cemetery were received from various sources — even a film was submitted.<sup>4</sup> An anonymous visitor to the exhibition

<sup>3</sup> “Der Spiegel”, 10 March 1997.

<sup>4</sup> This film by G. Kessel was broadcast on 13 April 1997, on the German TV current affairs program “Focus TV”. See W. Manoschek, *Beweisaufnahmen*, [in:] *Eine Ausstellung und ihre*

in Saarbrücken in 1999 handed in the photo album of a former member of the SS,<sup>5</sup> which contained images from Pančevo among the many photographs of dead and murdered persons. These show the bodies of the executed civilians next to the wall, as well as those who were hanged in the cemetery. The photographer is standing among the hanged men, and a comrade smiles and waves at him from behind the ropes. This means that Gerhard Gronefeld, an experienced propaganda unit photographer, was not the only person to have captured this crime on camera; many soldiers who later said that they had ‘wanted to see what it was like’<sup>6</sup> did the same. They not only took photographs, but also presented their pictures ‘in the office, where copies were ordered by many of the soldiers in their unit’.<sup>7</sup> In this way, the images of murder were reproduced over and over again.

Eleven photographs from the series were displayed on a panel in the exhibition. They included a photo of the execution, which is out of focus because Gronefeld shook the camera the moment the shots were fired. The second exhibition also showed this photo series, expanded to twenty-one images, but without the blurred photograph of the crucial moment. The photograph of the *coup de grâce* became the icon of the first exhibition because it presented a Wehrmacht soldier in the act of killing, with many others looking on and thus aware of the action. These photographs of the publicly conducted hangings and shootings of hostages following an improperly conducted drumhead trial confirmed the thesis of the exhibition: that the Wehrmacht was involved in crimes against civilians, prisoners of war and Jews. The provenance of the photograph was also certain beyond any doubt — the photographer and time and place were all precisely known.

## II

### THE FIRST AND SECOND WEHRMACHT EXHIBITION

The differences between the first and second exhibition are clearly manifested in the cover image of the two exhibition catalogues [fig. 2].

The catalogue of the first exhibition was published in 1996. It used a photograph from the exhibition as the motif for the cover. This same photograph, tinted blue, was also used in large format for the ‘Serbia’ section of the exhibition. The blurred

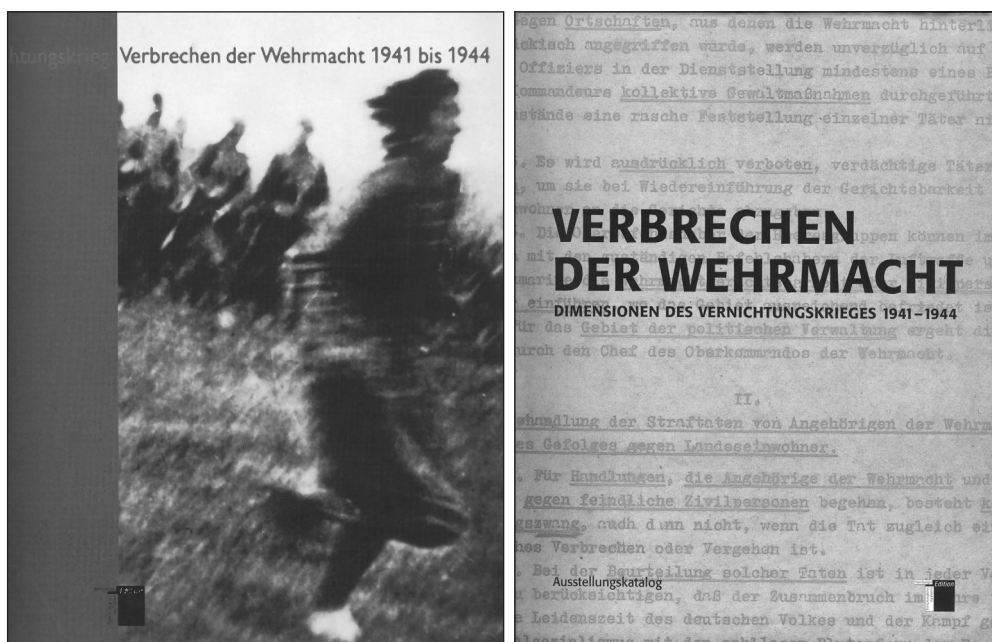
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*Folgen: Zur Rezeption der Ausstellung ‘Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944’*, ed. by Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, Hamburg 1999, p. 188.

<sup>5</sup> Illustrated in “Saarbrücker Hefte”, vol. LXXXI (summer 1999), pp. 37–78.

<sup>6</sup> Newspaper report on a doctor who recognized himself in the “Spiegel” cover image, in “Süddeutsche Zeitung”, 15 March 1997.

<sup>7</sup> Soldier’s letter, 1966, Ludwigsburg Central Office (of Judicial Authorities for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes), preliminary investigation 503 AR–Z 88/67, cited in W. M a n o s c h e k, *Beweisaufnahmen*, p. 191.



2. Left: Cover of the exhibition catalogue *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944*, Hamburg 1996; Right: Cover of the exhibition catalogue *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht. Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944*, Hamburg 2001

and out-of-focus photograph is of a woman running for her life, yet ultimately to certain death. It was part of a series of ten pictures from fall 1941, when General Böhme gave orders that the so-called hostages from the Šabac concentration camp in Serbia be shot. The ten photographs came from three different archives in Belgrade. They are anonymous; the blurriness and image details support conjectures that they were taken as private snapshots by German soldiers. Their archival labelling made it possible to attribute them to the murders in Šabac. The photographs were mounted close to one another in the exhibition, so that the course of the execution could be followed along the entire exhibition panel.

The catalogue cover of the second exhibition, ‘Verbrechen der Wehrmacht. Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944’ (‘Crimes of the German Wehrmacht: Dimensions of a war of annihilation, 1941–1944’) featured a page from the OKW ‘Order for the exercise of military jurisdiction and procedure in area “Barbarossa”, dated 13 May 1941, issued by Wilhelm Keitel from the Führer’s headquarters. Its colouring resembles that of a faded paper document. It is a piece of writing, not a photograph — a text, not an image. Whereas the authors of the first exhibition focused on a victim by using the photo of a woman fleeing, the historians of the second exhibition put the emphasis on the bureaucratic exercise of the perpetrators’ power of authority. This difference in weighting is also apparent in the design of the exhibition and the use of the photographs.

## REMEMBERED IMAGES

The first exhibition presented three typical cases — Serbia, the Sixth Army and Belarus — and arranged the facts and documents into narrative units that were limited in time and place. Text and images were used to create a narrative structure for visitors. The eight large metal panels of the ‘Iron Cross’ installation in the exhibition showed orders from the Wehrmacht leadership, as well as documentary texts by writers, philosophers and soldiers that could be viewed on the outer walls. These demonstrated how the climate of violence began even before 1933 and how it evolved during the war. On the inner side of the metal walls, roughly 326 photographs (primarily amateur photos by soldiers) were arranged according to motifs, with short captions and no further explanatory texts. There were approximately 350 photographs on the sixty-six panels of the three main chapters. The total number of photographs displayed was thus roughly 700, plus 735 small passport-size photos of those murdered in the massacre of Kragujevac. The exhibition deliberately played with the text and images in various ways. On the text/photo panels for the three main sections, the personal views of the soldiers were juxtaposed with the official photography of the propaganda companies. Corresponding to this arrangement, the display texts contained letters delivered via military post and facsimiles of ordinances and instructions. With the texts providing a historical interpretation, the overall impression created a narrative that guided visitors through the exhibition.

The small size of the reproductions throughout the exhibition — 9×13 or 10×15 cm (3½×5 or 4×6 in.) — was a reference to the typical size of photographs and reminded visitors of their own photo albums. This was confirmed by many entries in the exhibition guestbooks. The album of one soldier, which was reproduced in a large-size format for the exhibition, was a clear reference to the individual form of remembrance of people’s own family albums.

Despite the ample text panels, the exhibition was received both in Germany and abroad as a photographic exhibition. Bernard-Henri Lévy, in his extensive 1999 article in “Le Monde”, referred to it as a photo exhibition (*l’exposition photographique*);<sup>8</sup> the “Jerusalem Post” spoke of a ‘photo exhibition in Hamburg’;<sup>9</sup> and German newspapers specifically mentioned the impact of the pictures in their headlines: ‘Bilder, die man nicht vergisst’ (‘Pictures you never forget’);<sup>10</sup> ‘Die Fotografien springen einen an’ (‘The photographs jump out at you’);<sup>11</sup> ‘Kriegsfotos reißen Narben einer Generation auf’ (‘War photos tear open the scars of a generation’);<sup>12</sup> ‘Die gräßliche Wahrheit der Bilder’ (‘The

<sup>8</sup> “Le Monde”, 7 February 1999.

<sup>9</sup> “Jerusalem Post”, 28 March 1995.

<sup>10</sup> “Uetersener Nachrichten”, 30 January 1999.

<sup>11</sup> “Kölnische Rundschau”, 29 October 1998.

<sup>12</sup> “Rhein-Zeitung”, 13 August 1998.

horrendous truth of the pictures’);<sup>13</sup> ‘Man muß die Bilder lesen’ (‘You have to read the pictures’).<sup>14</sup>

#### RETURN OF THE TEXTS

The second exhibition took a deductive approach. The starting point was the debate over international humanitarian law and the laws of war that were valid in 1933. This was followed by seven thematic focuses (genocide, Soviet prisoners of war, starvation as a strategy of war, deportations, war against the partisans, reprisals and execution of hostages and options for action). The new exhibition had twice as much text as the first exhibition, but displayed only about half as many photographs (around three hundred). The preponderance of written documents was reinforced through numerous audio media featuring recorded readings of text. Computer terminals offered access to additional documentary texts and images. The press continually drew attention to how this exhibition differed from the first one: ‘You see the pictures of war crimes at more of a distance, as if through binoculars [...] you do want to know about the crimes of the last war, but no longer want to have to look at them’;<sup>15</sup> ‘All in all, it is less an exhibition than a cold white cubicle for reading and study’.<sup>16</sup>

The curators of the exhibition decided to use professional photographs by the propaganda companies almost exclusively and to omit nearly all of the amateur photographs and snapshots. Only photos of unambiguous provenance (in terms of archive, photographer, time and place) were used. Moreover, in conscious contrast to the first exhibition, all of the photographs were accompanied by commentary, in order to keep the shock value of the visual material to a minimum. Written documents and comprehensive explanatory texts were intended to re-establish the credibility that supposedly had been lost in the first exhibition because of four photographs that had not been adequately labelled. As Jan Philipp Reemtsma explained in 2001: ‘Photos play a much smaller role. And where they are used, they are placed precisely within the context. There are no longer any photographs without comment that allow the viewer to engage in free association. This was a stylistic method used in the first exhibition — and it rightly drew criticism. In the new exhibition, which is twice the size of the first one, documents and photographs appear in balanced proportions’.<sup>17</sup>

Reemtsma expressly emphasized the textual and documentary aspects of the exhibition. It was important for its curators that ‘the new concept put visitors

<sup>13</sup> “Süddeutsche Zeitung”, 25 February 1997.

<sup>14</sup> “Syker Zeitung”, 4 June 1997.

<sup>15</sup> S. Heidenreich, in *DE:BUG* 55 (January 2002), p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> M. Jeismann, in “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung”, 29 November 2001.

<sup>17</sup> J.P. Reemtsma, in “Lübecker Nachrichten”, 28 November 2001.

in a position to form their own opinion about what took place in history'.<sup>18</sup> The interpretation of texts and documents was desired, but it was not assumed that mature visitors to the exhibition, for whom media influence today is primarily visual, would be able to interpret the pictures. This clearly shows the discrepancy and the difficulty connected with the use of photographs and written source materials in exhibitions on contemporary history, where contextual information plays a specific role.

In selecting the photo motifs for the panels and the interior of the 'Iron Cross' installation, the curators of the first exhibition focused on shootings, hangings and persecution, whereas the historians preparing the second exhibition concentrated on selected series of documentations by propaganda company photographers, as well as more illustrative portraits of the generals and officers responsible. This served to eliminate a decisive stimulus for visitors: their recognition of the familiar motifs of snapshots from their own photo albums.

Whereas the first exhibition placed too little value on historicizing the picture captions, naming archives or providing provenance data, the second exhibition dealt with the source-critical treatment of photographs in a separate section.

It is evident that careful consideration and analysis of visual materials are absolutely necessary in dealing with the difficult field of research on perpetrators during the Nazi period. The sources of the amateur photographs and snapshots can often be well documented when they are acquired from private collections. In state archives, however, it is frequently impossible to identify the photographs because of where they were found (e.g., in the wallets of soldiers who were killed or taken prisoner) or because the provenance is taken out of context when the photographs are grouped together differently for forensic purposes. In such cases, necessary questions about the author, place, time and context of a photograph are often virtually impossible to answer. However, this does not mean that such photos can no longer be used.

### III

#### CHARTER

While the first exhibition was still underway, a conference on the subject of photographs as historical sources took place at the Hamburg Institute for Social Research in 1999. Scholars from various disciplines participated: historians, photo and art historians, archivists, anthropologists, museum curators and even a war photographer. The use of photographic material in exhibitions on contemporary history was discussed and a jointly written charter on the use of historical

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<sup>18</sup> U. Jureit, in "Die Zeit", 29 November 2001.

photographs was produced with the aim of assisting archivists and researchers in utilizing such visual sources.<sup>19</sup> As a main outcome of the conference, the charter includes recommendations regarding the provenance of photographs, the possible manipulation of negatives or re-enlargement, picture captions and the interpretation of photographs. It is meant to ensure the proper use of historical photographs, both in archives and by scholars and curators.

#### IV

##### 'FOCUS ON STRANGERS: PHOTO ALBUMS OF WORLD WAR II'<sup>20</sup>

In light of the heated debate on the use of photographs in the first exhibition and the deliberate omission in the second exhibition of private photos taken by soldiers, I took up the subject again with respect to a different exhibition, one that focused on the visual memories of the war that are present in almost every German and Austrian household. In contrast to the historians' archival research for the first exhibition, I analyzed the provenance of photo albums and boxes of photographs within the context of family biographies. Experiences with the visitors to the first Wehrmacht exhibition proved very useful in this process: 'We can assume that photographs showing Wehrmacht soldiers engaging in criminal and inhumane acts are far more threatening to the children of Wehrmacht soldiers than texts are'.<sup>21</sup> The photographs provide an opportunity to concretize and thus work through the impervious silence of former soldiers, helping to clarify the persistent sense of uncertainty and foreboding felt by their daughters and sons.

The collection of photographs for the research project and the exhibition was compiled between 2004 and 2006 through loans from private collections. The owners of the albums responded to articles in regional newspapers that had taken up the appeal publicized in the University of Oldenburg's press release on the research project. The numerous calls that were received are evidence of the great, evolving interest in finding a new way to view these pictures. Among the people who supplied photographs were sixteen former soldiers who could offer information on the subjects of the photographs, the layout of the albums or the

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<sup>19</sup> W. Buchmann, *Bilder in Archiven: Empfehlungen für den Umgang mit historischen Fotografien*, [in:] *Ein Jahrhundert wird besichtigt. Momentaufnahmen aus Deutschland*, ed. by Bundesarchiv, Koblenz 2004, p. 41.

<sup>20</sup> The exhibition "Fremde im Visier: Fotoalben aus dem Zweiten Weltkrieg" has been shown since 2009 in seven local museums in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands (Oldenburg, Munich, Frankfurt am Main, Jena, Peine, Delft and Graz) and will be shown in Vienna in autumn 2016. See: [www.fremde-im-visier.de](http://www.fremde-im-visier.de) [retrieved: 2 December 2015].

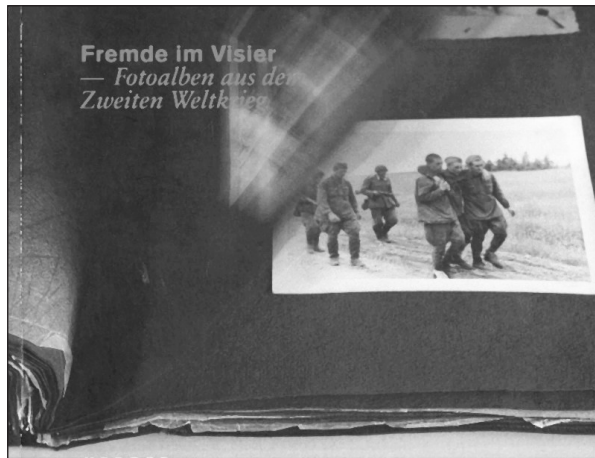
<sup>21</sup> G. Rosenthal, *Die Kinder des 'Dritten Reichs'*, [in:] *Besucher einer Ausstellung*, ed. by Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, Hamburg 1998, pp. 116–117.



motivation for taking the pictures. Most of the albums, however, were loaned by the generation of the daughters and sons. We were able to determine the provenance of most of the photographs by asking the former soldiers and their descendants.

The research project examined questions of the practice and significance of taking the pictures, as well as the exchange of photos among soldiers. Aesthetic influences and visual ideas of the ‘other’, as documented by the pictures, were compared with the photo journalism of the 1920s and 1930s and examined with regard to their relationship to the photo aesthetics of the Nazis. The arrangement and annotation of the photographs refer to the album as a narrative space for subjective constructions of memory.

The exhibition is centered around the photo albums of the soldiers [fig. 3]. A war album is a special sort of album; often it tells a story kept hermetically separate from a family’s history; and it took on a special meaning as early as the first year of the war. In the 1930s, preprinted, official albums from the Hitler Youth and the Reich Labour Service became a fixture among the private family and travel albums in household collections; and in 1939 standardized ‘Erinnerungen an



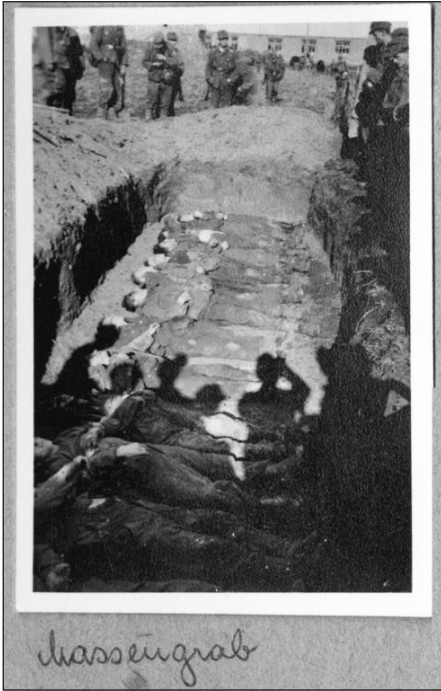
3. Cover of the exhibition catalogue *Fremde im Visier. Fotoalben aus dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Bielefeld 2009

meine Dienstzeit’ (‘Memories of my term of service’) albums were introduced, which frequently featured swastikas, oak leaves and eagle insignias on their covers. Photography magazines published instructions on how to make a war album, and photo labs had small, selected sample albums to encourage soldiers to collect war photos in albums.

As early as 1933, Joseph Goebbels called on an ‘army of millions of amateur photographers’<sup>22</sup> to educate the nation according to the principles of National Socialist propaganda, and an appeal published in the “Photofreund” journal at the beginning of the war added force to this demand: ‘At this time it is the unconditional duty of every soldier to keep his camera in action’.<sup>23</sup> The cheap lightweight cameras

<sup>22</sup> W. Frerk, *Das Erlebnis des Einzelnen ist zu einem Volkserlebnis geworden und das durch die Kamera!*, “Photofreund”, 1933, p. 417, cited in T. Starl, *Knipser: Die Bildgeschichte der privaten Fotografie in Deutschland und Österreich von 1880 bis 1980*, Munich–Berlin 1985, p. 19.

<sup>23</sup> H. Starke, *Und trotzdem: Amateurfotografie!*, “Photofreund”, 1939, cited in T. Starl, *Knipser*, p. 111.



4. Album Hans Mayer, Massengrab  
(massgrave), Ukraine 1942.  
© Spielhahnjägermuseum, Bad Tölz

made by Agfa, Robot and Leica made them easier for recruits to buy and use. This resulted in vast numbers of private photographs being taken by soldiers during the Second World War — equal in quantitative terms to the millions of images taken by the Nazi propaganda units. The occupation of foreign countries was photographed by the participating soldiers on an unprecedented scale.

The albums contain a mixture of a wide variety of motifs of soldiers' everyday routines, military equipment and acts of both visible and concealed violence. Everyday scenes from the front lines or in the occupied countries are juxtaposed in the albums with pictures of hangings and shootings [fig. 4].

Unlike the propaganda unit photographers, 'common' soldiers had no specific assignment as far as their photographs were concerned. They chose their own subject matter, adjusted the camera to suit the lighting conditions, selected an appropriate

location and view and used a rangefinder to focus. At the moment they clicked the shutter, their attention was diverted from what was taking place in front of the camera; they had only one eye on the viewfinder. On the one hand, this had an extremely pronounced distancing effect, partly neutralizing the other senses such as smell and hearing, and led to an objectified perception of what was seen. The insertion of the camera as a technical device between the photographer/viewer and the event produced a 'cold eye',<sup>24</sup> a 'separation of viewing as a purely optical process from the other modes of sensory perception and from the emotions', and thereby 'enabled that "hardness towards oneself" that constituted the greatest virtue and educational ideal of all military officers'.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, taking photographs also involves an intensified mode of seeing that stimulates the photographer's sense of curiosity and can become a tool for heightening pleasure: a 'hot eye'. At the moment of looking through the viewfinder, perceptual aware-

<sup>24</sup> See G. Mattenklott, *Kalte Augen*, [in:] *Der übersinnliche Leib*, vol. II, Reinbek 1982, p. 47ff., cited in D. Reifarh, V. Schmidt-Linsenhoff, *Die Kamera der Henker*, "Fotogeschichte", vol. III, 1983, no. 7, pp. 57–71.

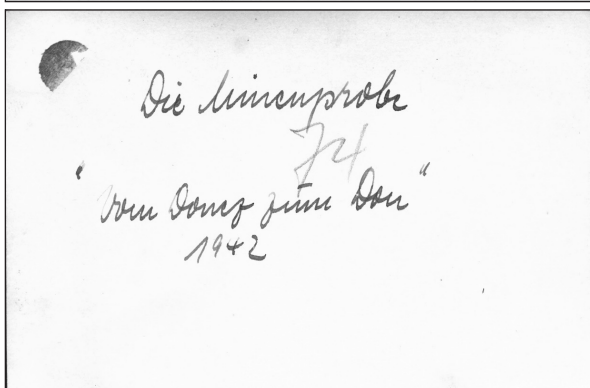
<sup>25</sup> Reifarh and Schmidt-Linsenhoff, *ibidem*.

ness distances the photographer from the person in front of the camera; ‘the other, even when not an enemy, is regarded only as someone to be seen, not someone (like us) who also sees’.<sup>26</sup>

A ban on photographing executions was issued in 1941, but this did not change the soldiers’ interest in taking pictures of such scenes.<sup>27</sup> This observation is supported by many photographs in the albums, such as the picture in the Soviet Union where staring soldiers can be seen standing around a mass grave, and the photographer himself casts a black shadow over the dead bodies.

In closing, I would like to consider the special significance of private war photography as a historical source by examining a photograph from a series of 142 pictures from Ukraine in the summer of 1942 that have so far

been discovered in six different albums and collections of photographs [fig. 5]. Among the typical depictions of advancing army forces, battle scenes and pictures of destruction, this is one photograph that at first glance does not fit into this context of war images. It shows a woman crossing a river, photographed at an angle from above. Sunlight is reflected in the rippling water behind her, while her body casts a long shadow on the flat, smooth surface to her right. She is locked into position by the light and shadow, as if caught in the crosshairs of the image diagonals. Despite the balanced composition and the calm, almost idyllic subject matter with no visible trace of an act of war, this centered positioning of the subject — held within the neatly trimmed white margins of the photograph — leaves the



5. Album anon., Die Minenprobe. Vom Donetz zum Don 1942 (The mine detection test: From the Donets to the Don, 1942), Ukraine. Obverse and reverse.

©Auris-Verlag

<sup>26</sup> S. Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, New York 2003, p. 72.

<sup>27</sup> Official gazette of the Waffen-SS, vol. II, no. 11 (15 June 1941).

viewer feeling slightly disturbed without knowing precisely why. The number 74 is written on the back of one copy of the photograph, although this number is missing from the torn picture list. The context was not revealed until the identical photograph with a description on the reverse was found in another album. The caption reads: 'Die Minenprobe. Vom Donez zum Don 1942' ('The mine detection test: From the Donets to the Don, 1942'). The picture shows the deadly implementation of the order to use 'mine detection device 42': 'As enemy mines are to be expected, sufficient numbers of mine detection device 42 (Jews or captured members of partisan groups with harrows and rollers) are to be made available'.<sup>28</sup> The arrangement in the album includes three other photographs: two are entitled 'Durch die Furt' ('Across the ford'), and the third is 'Trümmer' ('Wreckage'). After the woman appeared to have safely reached the opposite bank, the Wehrmacht soldiers and their vehicle were able to cross the ford to the other side of the river. However, the subsequent vehicle clearly drove over a mine next to the bridge.

The next ten photographs in the series (numbers 78–87) also depict death and destruction. By being placed in a numbered sequence, the individual images not only form a chronologically and spatially localized continuum, but their serial progression also enables content-based readings.

The sequence of these photographs can be regarded as the nucleus of the series, as it shows danger, destruction, death and violence on both sides of the conflict. It refers to how it could have been: how the war was perceived, not how it really was. The picture series, which is probably a combination of images taken by the propaganda unit photographers attached to the division and by amateur photographers among the troops, removes the individual photograph from the explanatory context and sequence of the deliberately compiled series. The photographs are therefore put into different contexts, and it is only with a bit of finder's luck during the research process that the violence inherent within them can be uncovered.

## CONCLUSION

By analyzing these private war photos, one can establish connections with the two exhibitions on the crimes of the Wehrmacht. The shock value of the so-called wallet photos in the first exhibition, as emphasized by the press, was based not on the publication of these 'previously unknown pictures that had been taken from uniform jackets',<sup>29</sup> and that were collected in the memorials and archives of

<sup>28</sup> Orders to go into action from the Commander of the Army Rear Area (Kortück) 532 for the *Unternehmen Dreieck und Viereck* (Operations Triangle and Quadrangle) of 9 September 1942, BAMA, RH 23/26, Bl. 90.

<sup>29</sup> H. Lethen, *Der Text der Historiografie und der Wunsch nach einer physikalischen Spur. Das*

military history, but on the recognition by so many German and Austrian families of their own war photos stored in albums and boxes. Photographs that previously had only been looked at within a private framework of family gatherings or meetings of fellow soldiers now took on a new topicality in terms of contemporary history, within the scope of the public classification of the exhibition. The second exhibition deepened these insights, with its expanded contextualization in the ‘cocoon of commentaries and explanations’.<sup>30</sup> By dispensing with the private photographic material, however, it sacrificed the aesthetic impact of activating viewers’ memories of their own, often concealed ‘heat chambers of empathy’.<sup>31</sup>

The “Focus on Strangers” exhibition offers an idea of the motivation and mentality of those who actively served in the war, by verifying the provenance of the pictures and interviewing the album owners. The background of the pictures came to the fore, as well as some of the unplumbed depths behind them.

Many albums were transferred from private ownership to the archives of city museums on the occasion of their presentation in the ‘Focus on Strangers’ exhibition and its supporting program, ‘Ihr Album unter der Lupe’ (‘Your album, close-up’). Such actions took these private memory stores out of their dark cabinets and brought them into the light, to take their place alongside the ‘written traces of the perpetrators’<sup>32</sup> in publicly accessible archives.

With its more sociological approach, phenomenological research evinces a new sensibility towards the perception of war photography. In the first Wehrmacht exhibition, the motifs of executions, murder and violence proved the thesis that the Wehrmacht had been deeply involved in war crimes. The second exhibition stressed the written documents and several series by professional propaganda photographers. The ‘Focus on Strangers’ exhibition about the private photos of the Wehrmacht soldiers offers an opportunity to look at situations where violence had broken out. Series of photos — sometimes even proved with numbered negatives — fixed in albums or stored in files and boxes could be regarded in the context of diaries, letters, other written documents and interviews. These photographed situations from the daily lives of soldiers in the middle of the violence of war emphasize the motivations and can even highlight a glimpse of mentality — because ‘at the moment when the picture was taken, something was done to people; without this act, there would be no photograph. That is what gives it such explosive force’.<sup>33</sup>

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*Problem der Fotografie in den beiden Wehrmachtausstellungen*, “Zeitgeschichte”, vol. XXIX, 2002, no. 2, p. 76.

<sup>30</sup> “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung”, 29 November 2001.

<sup>31</sup> H. L e t h e n, *Der Text der Historiografie*, p. 83.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 84.

<sup>33</sup> C. B r i n k, *Vor aller Augen: Fotografien-wider-Willen in der Geschichtsschreibung*, “Werkstatt Geschichte”, vol. XLVII, 2007, p. 72.

## APPENDIX

CHARTER  
RESOLUTION

The participants of the conference 'The Photograph as an Historical Source' at the Hamburg Institute for Social Research from 23 to 25 June 1999 are agreed that historical photographic images held in archives, museums and other depositories are in many cases still not being properly looked after and are not being paid adequate attention in academic research. For this reason, the participants of the conference address the following recommendations to archivists and those who use photographic material held in archives:

1. When accepting historical photographic images, information on their provenance, the context in which they were produced, their photographer, their transmission history and, where applicable, the holder of exploitation rights must be documented as far as reasonably possible. The same applies to duplicates.

2. In archives, historical photographic images are sorted in accordance with the principle of provenance, where images are allocated to holdings based on their provenance. Indexing images by content is a separate procedure that is not carried out by allocating images to thematic series across holdings, but by means of appropriate finding aids, such as database systems.

3. In cases where copies of historical photographic images are made for conservation reasons, the earliest transmitted version of an image, ideally the first exposed negative, must be kept.

4. In the restoration of historical photographic images, the established rules for handling archival materials must be followed. In particular, procedures must be documented in such a way that the nature and the extent of the restoration work are clear.

5. When publishing photographic images, the earliest available version and image annotation must be used or referenced. As far as reasonably possible, information must be provided on the photographer, the depository, the photograph's identification information, the place the photograph was taken, the time it was taken, and the circumstances in which it was taken.

6. In the case of historical photographic images dating from the Second World War, an appropriate verification system should be developed as a model in order to store information on holdings and collections of such images in archives, museums and other depositories throughout Europe.

7. Archives and other depositories bear responsibility for preserving historical photographic images as cultural assets. This responsibility must not be compromised or threatened by privatisation or commercialisation.